

**OPERATING BUDGET MEETING
OF THE
PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE**

Minutes

The Public Works Operating Budget Meeting was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, Smithtown, New York, on Wednesday, **October 22, 2003** at 9:30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Legislator Joseph Caracappa - Chairman
Legislator Brian Foley
Legislator Peter O'Leary

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

John Ortiz - Budget Review Office
Charles Bartha - Commissioner of Public Works
Catherine Stark - County Executive's Office
Ken Knappe - County Executive's Office
Alexandra Sullivan - Chief Deputy Clerk
Leslie Mitchel - DPW
Bob Shinnick - DPW
Cheryl Felice - AME

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Donna Catalano - Court Stenographer

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(*THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER at 9:43 A.M.*)

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

Good morning, everyone. Please rise for the Pledge of Allegiance to be led by Legislator Foley.

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CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

Good morning. This is a public hearing on the Operating Budget as it pertains to the Department of Public Works and Transportation. I'd

ask the Commissioner and all the people he would like to bring forward to come forward at this point in time. Commissioner, I'm just going to turn it over to you at this point in time and let you do a presentation as to your needs, nonneeds, likes and dislikes as it relates to issues of the Operating Budget.

COMMISSIONER BARTHA:

Good morning, and thank you. We pretty much agree with BRO's presentation. Just a couple of items that we'd like to point out that we take issue with. One is not -- most importantly, is not something we're taking issue with, but with respect to the staffing. Subsequent to our submission of the budget to County Executive's Office, we were reevaluating in our Highway Engineering Division and really believe we need some additional positions in that area to prosecute work. And I believe I've forwarded the Chairman some information on that.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

Just so you know, Charlie, I'm filing that as a stand-alone. It's currently being done as we speak. So those positions that you ask for, hopefully we can get.

COMMISSIONER BARTHA:

Thank you. We certainly appreciate that. For the benefit of the committee, I'll elaborate a little bit on --

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

Legislator Foley too is the prime cosponsor.

COMMISSIONER BARTHA:

Thank you. It's a combination of professional engineer positions as well as support technical staff that will be involved in reducing some of the backlog that we have in the highway area, we have gotten ourselves somewhat hamstrung on getting those projects out, both in highways and bridges and structures. Additionally, in our traffic area, on the highways, in order to be to respond to the numerous requests we get regarding the requests for traffic signals and traffic safety considerations, as well as including one position in finance to help make the payments for the associated work.

Something that we disagree with that's included in the BRO report is the issue of purchasing cars that are -- have been leased for the last three years in the Labor Department. If you look at what has been paid over the last three years for lease pavements, it is pretty close to what we pay to buy a new car. It just seems counter to the idea of pay-as-you-go, and the cars would not come with any

warranties. We have -- the intent is to buy used cars. You can buy

used cars with warranties. This is pretty much all we have to say.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:
That's it. Questions?

LEG. FOLEY:
Sure.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:
Legislator Foley.

LEG. FOLEY:
Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Commissioner, I'm pleased to hear that you see the need for additional staffing, particularly in highways and designs. It's something that this committee over a period of years -- when I was Chair and now Legislator Caracappa as Chair -- we've moved forward with a number of projects through the Capital Program only to have -- have them somewhat slowed down, if you will, through the process because of the lack of personnel. So I'm happy to hear that you are looking -- you see the need, you've identified the need for additional positions.

The follow up question to that naturally is as much as we're going to be putting those positions in and making the case for it, I think what you have to do as well is to frame out how you intend to undertake a successful recruitment strategy. Part of the problem here as has happened in the Health Department with nursing and others is that we have provided the positions, then it's been up to the department to try to go out and successfully recruit for those positions. So if not today, maybe you can outline today, but also get back to us over the next week or two prior to the Budget Meeting on the 6th of November just how you intend to go about recruiting for those positions, because that has been a huge, huge problem.

COMMISSIONER BARTHA:
Certainly.

LEG. FOLEY:
Challenge. Let's call it a challenge.

COMMISSIONER BARTHA:
I certainly agree. We've experience that a number of times in the past, and we're experiencing it right now in recruiting a senior level engineer position for the Water Quality Program. We've advertised in Newsday. And what -- we had some limit response of good candidates, and when it came right down to accepting the position, the candidates backed out. And so it is a problem.

LEG. FOLEY:
Not just for the seniors -- if I may just through the Chair, also for

junior civils and engineers fresh out of the college. I know that you are competing with some in the private sector, but if there are ways in which we can -- we've said this before, can be of help, I know we have increased the starting salaries in the past for those positions. If there are other things that need to be done in order meet the

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realities of the market place, trying to successfully compete with the private world, if you will, we need to know those things to help you move forward with projects that are important to us within our Legislative Districts and important to the County as a whole.

COMMISSIONER BARTHA:

Well, it would be important for the funding for those positions to start in April. This would give us the ability to get the positions released from the Exec's Office and to recruit at the end of the college year. What's happened sometimes in the past is that the positions are released later in the year and most people already have a job and are not about to hop jobs within the first few months.

LEG. FOLEY:

Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

Anything? Any other comments from anyone in the audience that would like to address the committee as it relates to the Operating Budget?

LEG. FOLEY:

Another follow up, Mr. Chairman, if I may, since no one from the public has come forward. As it relates to positions, and this is in the Transportation Division. Many of us have -- have been very supportive of the -- of expanding the bus shelter program. And happily they are newer designs of shelters that will make them a bit, -- let's say more aesthetically pleasing to -- for both -- for both -- those who utilize the buses as well as those of us who have an interest in this, it's not just a functional look, it's going to fit more into the character the downtowns and elsewhere. We've seem to have hit a roadblock where it's maybe about 20 to 25 shelters a year is what's processed.

So the question I would ask is is there a way since this is a 90-10 split, it only a 10% local share for these bus shelters, which amounts to only hundreds of dollars, plus all of us want to try to -- again, use the word recruit or persuade more people to use our bus system. One of the ways we can do it is by increasing -- improving the amenities of the system. Have you ever looked at it programmatically how we can try to ramp up the number of shelters that we process in any given year from 25 -- 20 th 25 to 45 to 50, and what that means as

far as either staffing or some other areas that are causing the, you know, again, this slowing down -- forgive me for being ungrammatical, but this, you know, lack of real movement in the area, whether you want to hear from Mr. Shinnick -- I mean, what would it take to go up to 50 a year? Because it certainly isn't a budgetary issue.

COMMISSIONER BARTHA:

I'm going to turn it over to Bob Shinnick to respond to that.

MR. SHINNICK:

Good morning.

LEG. FOLEY:

Good morning.

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MR. SHINNICK:

It's only a budgetary issue in the context of the monies that would be used to acquire the shelters would come out of existing formula federal grants. And that money is always used for some purpose, so that it would be shifting from areas where we might be buying a van or something else. But, no, we do have the money available. The issues that we've confronted with bus shelters is we've -- we have ongoing lists of locations that are viable, we think, for bus shelters that have either been recommended to us or we come about them on our own through the passengers or our own investigations.

LEG. FOLEY:

Well, you may have some Legislators who make suggestion as to where they can go also.

MR. SHINNICK:

Yes. There's different attitudes on these things too, yes. But when we begin looking at the sites themselves, quite often we have property issues. And this is not a negative situation, but we do have to screen through the list to find out where these are viable, can be located, etcetera. So, you know, we can expand the -- the placement of shelters. It's a lot of work with each site, but we can do it. What we've found is out of maybe 30 locations that seem reasonable, we seem to be coming back to 20, 25, even sometimes less.

LEG. FOLEY:

Well, if I may, just through the Chair, and I think the Chair for the extended time here, what I've found to be part challenge to this also and it's in other areas of County Government as well -- I know in times past you have to get the County Attorney's Office involved with these things in order -- particularly if you have to get a foot or two or three feet of private property and also Real Estate. So there's a

group of folks, not just within Public Works, but also in the supportive agencies to make these things happen, where again, there seems to be -- whether it's a mountain of paperwork or what have you, that when I have followed up or my staff has followed up, many times there are issues within the County Attorney's Office that have to be resolved.

So again, to identify those things as to what might be slowing this process down, whether or not there are certain folks within the County Attorney's Office that have too much of a workload or, you know, maybe someone else should be doing this work. We really need to identify how we can accelerate this program, because those of us who really are serious about -- you know, we spend tens of million of dollars appropriating money for new buses and the like and expanding bus routes, but if he don't keep pace with the bus shelter program, I think that we're going to fall short of our goal by -- by missing out in a very important link to this whole process, which is to help those waiting for buses, particularly in inclement weather, to have a place of dignity to wait for the bus. So let's find a way how we can accelerate it and whether it needs to have another County Attorney or two or whatever it might be, let's see how we can do it, and we talk about it in succeeding committee meetings.

MR. SHINNICK:

We'll put together a small action plan so to speak, what's necessary to accomplish that.

LEG. FOLEY:

Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

You're quite welcome. Charlie, we appreciate it. And we have one card presented. Cheryl Felice, President of AME.

MS. FELICE:

Good morning, members of the committee.

LEG. FOLEY:

Good morning.

MS. FELICE:

I appreciate your efficiency, although I apologize that we walked in a little late. We did have some of our auditors here. My name is Cheryl Felice, I'm President of AME and along side of me is Ann Able, the Treasurer of AME. And we have been engaged in going over the budget to perform an analysis. We wanted to let the members of this committee know as well as the remaining committees that we're here in

the spirit the cooperation with an eye towards negotiation as our contract does expire next year.

So we did go over a few items that we wanted to point out to you in the Public Works budget and also wanted to let you know we are preparing a written analysis that will be provided to each and every one of by tomorrow. And if any supplements are needed, we'll do that as well. One of the -- one of the many things that we wanted to pay attention to was the fact that a lot of understaffing still takes place in Public Works due to the early retirement incentive that was in 2001. And as a result of that, work -- work slowdowns have been a result of the burden -- the overburden and the volume of work in the various buildings.

There's simply not enough, for example, custodial personnel to cover the square footage that they are assigned to do. And we also have a lot of out of title work that is utilized to maintain the work overload. And just simple volume that we have to deal with. We also are concerned about contracting out. We are very, very appreciative of the County changing the facilities for CPS and Adult Protection Services and many of the social service agencies to the new Mac Arthur Park Building. However, the former building was maintained by County custodial and maintenance staff. And the new building is now maintained by -- through the lease with contracted agencies. So our people are no longer in there. And that also impedes on the ability to advance promotionally, so on and so forth.

So those are the some of the items we wanted to make sure that you are aware of. We also wanted to make sure that you are aware of, because of this understaffing, that the deterioration of the buildings continue to -- to goes on. And the negligent that goes on in various buildings -- I'm sure I don't have to mention Coram facility is a

constant dilemma in this County. And again, we point to the fact that we have understaffing issues that must be addressed and must be addressed in this building -- in this budget and has to be balanced out with the contract agencies that are involved in the work that's provided. So that's what we have for you at this point. We look forward to an open exchange and dialog with you. And we appreciate you're -- you're allowing us to speak before you. And we will have a written report for you tomorrow when we appear at the remaining committees. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN CARACAPPA:

Thank you, Cheryl. Any questions from committee members? Thank you very much. Is there any other business to come before this hearing? We're adjourned.

(*THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 10:00 A.M.*)

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